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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 ZAGREB 000688

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SUBJECT: CROATIAN LEADERS FOCUS ON REGIONAL ISSUES DURING
DEPUTY SECRETARY ENGLAND'S VISIT TO CROATIA

Classified By: Peter D'Amico, Political Officer, for Reasons 1.4 B/D.

¶1. (C) Summary: During his September 29 visit to Zagreb, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England discussed regional and military issues with Prime Minister Sanader, President Mesic, Foreign Minister Jandrovic, and Defense Minister Vukelic. Sanader thanked the USG for its help on NATO accession. Sanader also discussed a recent private meeting with Serbian President Tadic in which Sanader emphasized that Belgrade needed to accept reality on Kosovo. Tadic complained that Croatia's decision to recognize Kosovo's independence had made relations between the two countries "tough" and warned of possible consequences. On Bosnia, Sanader stressed that he wanted to preserve Bosnia's territorial integrity, but that Bosnian Croats needed a greater voice. In a separate meeting, Mesic also raised concerns about the potential for future conflict in Bosnia and called for the international community to do more to rein in Republika Srpska Prime Minister Dodik. Over lunch, FM Jandrovic said that Serbian FM Jeremic remained focused on trying to maintain Serbia's claims to Kosovo. DefMin Vukelic praised the excellent bilateral military cooperation between the U.S. and Croatia and thanked the USG for its support.
End Summary.

Sanader Gives Overview of Region and Thanks to USG

¶2. (C) Thanks for U.S. Support: PM Sanader appeared upbeat and satisfied with his just completed trip to New York for the UN General Assembly (UNGA). He noted that he had many meetings with a number of international leaders on the margins of UNGA and stated that he had made a special effort to reach out to regional leaders. The PM thanked Deputy Secretary England for his personal efforts on behalf of Croatia as well as the great support of the USG. President Bush's visit in April and the U.S. Senate's quick approval of Croatia's NATO accession protocol demonstrated the strength of the relationship between the two countries. The strong signal from the Senate would encourage other NATO allies to move quickly to ratify. England replied that the USG was delighted to support Croatia and that he hoped Croatia would become a full member of NATO at the April 2009 summit in

Strasbourg and Kehl. The rapid progress that had taken place was a testament to the solid leadership in the country.

¶3. (C) Serbia: Sanader said in a private one-on-one meeting in New York he delivered three key messages to Serbian President Boris Tadic: 1. Kosovo's independence is a reality. 2. Kosovo's independence was irreversible. 3. Croatia wanted Serbia to be a member of Euro-Atlantic institutions. Sanader encouraged Tadic to let go of Kosovo. While Tadic was in a tough situation politically he was also in a strong position following his election wins. The best time to take a courageous move would be now, Sanader told Tadic. Belgrade needed to decide about the future direction of the country, and selling large amounts of Serbia's energy infrastructure to the Russians sent mixed messages about which side Serbia wanted to join.

¶4. (C) Tadic told Sanader that the GoC had made bilateral relations tough by recognizing the independence of Kosovo and that Belgrade could still create problems in Croatia. Tadic noted that there will still members of the so-called "government" of the "Republic of Serb Krajina" in Serbia, whose members had recently recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Sanader said that he did not necessarily take this comment seriously. Sanader responded by telling Tadic they were both modern politicians and should deal with issues in that way and not by acting like Slobodan Milosevic.

¶5. (C) Sanader did suggest that a letter released in

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September by Serbian Democratic Forum (SDF) in Croatia, which heavily criticized the GoC, might be part of an effort by Belgrade to create problems in Croatia. While the Serbian community in Croatia had some problems, the GoC was trying to resolve those issues. Sanader noted that the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS), the SDF's rivals, were part of the government and one of its members was a Deputy Prime Minister.

¶6. (C) Sanader stated that the GoC would continue talks with Belgrade. Once Serbia returned its ambassador to Zagreb, a delegation of Croatian parliamentarians from the Foreign Affairs Committee would go to Belgrade to share experiences from Croatia's EU bid. The GoC would also continue to remain involved in the region as a whole, with the main goal being stability and prosperity for all of Southeastern Europe. England stressed that it was important for regional leaders to stay focused on the future well-being of their citizens and not get caught up on the problems of the past.

¶7. (C) Bosnia and Herzegovina: Sanader stressed that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) needed to be preserved as a whole. BiH was like a stool with three legs. Each of BiH's constituent people represented a leg and if any of them were cut then the country would topple. The Republika Srpska (RS) should not even think about accession to Serbia as RS PM Milan Dodik had mentioned. The RS needed to remain part of BiH for regional stability, otherwise a war would likely breakout. Sanader also emphasized that he wanted Bosnian Croats to stay in BiH to keep the country stable and to prevent a wave of refugees to Croatia.

¶8. (C) Sanader said that in his meetings with international leaders he repeatedly stressed that the Bosnian Croats were dominated by the Bosniaks in the Federation and they should have a more equal position. One way to achieve this would be to give the Bosnian Croats the same number of minister positions as the Bosniaks since they shared common interests. He expressed concern that when Croatia joins NATO and the EU that many Bosnian Croats would leave BiH if they continued to feel powerless. Sanader emphasized that he did not want a massive influx of Bosnian Croats. Bosnian Croats were part of BiH and should remain that way, as should the Bosnian Serbs. England stressed that the USG wanted to preserve

BiH's territorial integrity and that the possibility of RS separating threatened regional stability.

¶19. (C) Macedonia: Sander reported that he discussed the name issue with Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski and Greek FM Dora Bakoyannis in New York. While praising the work of UN Negotiator Nimetz, Sanader believed that a solution was unlikely anytime soon. The positions of both sides were hardening and becoming less rational. When Sanader told Crvenkovski that Nimetz's pre-Bucharest offer had been a good one, Crvenkovski replied that the name New Macedonia would be an unacceptable since it did not imply a continuation of Macedonian identity. England expressed hope that a compromise could soon be found on the name issue since it was important to have a unified front on larger issues such as Russia's aggression in Georgia.

¶110. (C) Non-Aligned Movement and Mesic: Echoing his comments to the press in New York, Sanader said that it might be useful to weigh in with President Mesic that Croatia's future was with NATO and the EU and not the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Some of Mesic's advisors' still believed that Croatia needed to be part of NAM like in the old Yugoslav times. This sometimes led to disagreements between Sanader and Mesic over Croatia's policy positions in the UN Security Council. Sanader wanted Croatia to stand with the United States and EU members of the Security Council. However, some of Mesic's advisors felt they had a debt to NAM countries since they believed that Croatia owed its membership on the Security

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Council to their support. Qader recognized that NAM countries' votes had been important, but they also knew at the time that Croatia was in the process of joining NATO and the EU.¶

¶111. (C) Croatia EU Bid: Sanader stated that Croatia had achieved its goals on the path to the EU and would successfully overcome the remaining challenges such as the privatization of shipyards. The Prime Minister noted that in his recent meeting with EU Commission President Barosso, the two expressed the hope that Croatia would finish technical negotiations with the Commission by September or October of 2009. Barosso wanted to finish the negotiations before the end of his term in October 2009. Sanader said he was aiming for Croatia to join the EU by the end of 2010. It would take a little over a year's time from the end of negotiations since the necessary documents would need to be translated into all official EU languages and the EU member countries would then have to ratify Croatia's candidacy.

President Mesic Raises Red Flag about BiH

¶112. (SBU) President Mesic presented England with a decoration for promoting bilateral ties between the U.S. and Croatia. England thanked Croatia for its contributions and sacrifices for peace and stability around the world. In a private meeting following the awards ceremony, Mesic began by expressing thanks to England and through him to the American people for supporting Croatia in achieving its strategic goals of NATO and EU membership.

¶113. (C) Bosnia: Mesic expressed deep concerns about the future of BiH. Dayton stopped war but did not create a mechanism for governing BiH effectively. The root of the problem was that the RS was founded on a policy of ethnic cleansing and was opposed to the very existence of a B-H state. The architects and ideologues of the RS from the war might be in the Hague, but their creation and policies still lived on. There was a great danger in the leadership of the RS arguing that BiH was not a permanent arrangement, but that the RS was. These statements seriously undermined BiH's territorial integrity. The High Representative Miroslav Lajcak, whom Mesic would be seeing immediately afterwards, needed more help. Mesic also implied that the Russian ambassador in Bosnia was actively encouraging Dodik's

irresponsible policies.

¶14. (C) Dodik presented a serious threat to peace and Mesic pleaded for the international community to be more engaged. Mesic recalled his days of warning the international community about Milosevic and said that he is now delivering a similar warning about Dodik. Dodik acted as though the only part of Dayton that counts is the part that established the RS and he was not living up to the other commitments of Dayton. For example, Dodik had not permitted enough returns of Bosnian Croats to areas of the RS. 200,000 Bosnian Croats fled from Posavina area and only 10,000 had returned after war. Mesic said Dodik needed to be told to adhere to all parts of Dayton and be given a firm deadline. If he doesn't, then there should be "new Dayton," although Mesic did not specific on what he meant by a &new Dayton."

¶15. (C) Mesic predicted that if a solution was not found and BiH collapsed, then would go to Serbia, and Bosnian Croats would come to Croatia. Left with a rump Islamic state in Europe, the Bosniaks would likely seek friends in fundamentalist Islamic countries. This would make Bosnia a potential haven for terrorists in the center of Europe. England stressed the need to preserve BiH territorial integrity and that the USG was opposed to Dodik's attempts to undermine BiH. He said the USG would work to try to strengthen Lajcak.

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¶16. (C) Kosovo: Mesic stated that Kosovo's independence completed the "final architecture of the region." Mesic supported the USG view that Kosovo was a different case than South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Serbs were both unable to govern Kosovo and unable to negotiate its separation. Kosovo independence was now a reality and Belgrade had only itself to blame. England agreed that an independent Kosovo was a reality that Serbia needed to come to terms with.

FM Jandrovic on FM Jeremic's Plans for Kosovo

¶17. (C) During an informal conversation over lunch, Foreign Minister Jandrovic said he had a private one-on-one with Serbian FM Jeremic in New York. Jandrovic came away from that meeting very discouraged about Serbia moving forward from Kosovo. Jeremic had maintained that "no Serb politician could ever accept the independence of Kosovo." Jeremic was counting on the UN General Assembly voting to send Serbia's case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). He then hoped for a positive judgment by the ICJ, and that Serbia would be able to use this judgment to resist pressure from the EU to recognize Kosovo as a condition for membership in the EU.

¶18. (C) Jandrovic said he is headed for Skopje on September 30 and that he would urge the Macedonians to make a deal on the name issue. However, he saw little prospect of that happening any time this year. On Bosnia, Jandrovic was also concerned about the direction that Dodik was taking in BiH. He argued that the international community needed to find a solution and that more needed to be done to protect the rights of all the constituent peoples of BiH. He was pessimistic that EU countries were paying enough attention to BiH or that they would be resolute in standing up to Dodik.

DefMin Vukelic/CHOD Lucic Praise Cooperation with US

¶19. (C) Strong Bilateral Relations: Defense Minister Branko Vukelic thanked England for the excellent cooperation between Croatia and the United States on military matters. He noted that there was extensive cooperation on a number of issues and that the MoD wanted to continue and expand bilateral ties as appropriate.

¶20. (C) Region: The Chief of the General Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces (CHOD) Josip Lucic said Croatia was committed to working with all the members of the Adriatic Charter, new and old, in building ties with NATO. The Croatian Armed Forces (CAF) wanted to cooperate with Serbia whenever Belgrade was open to it. England praised the decision of GoC to recognize Kosovo, which added to the region's stability. England added that the USG supported the Adriatic Charter on the highest levels.

¶21. (C) Peacekeeping: England praised Croatia for having its forces in peacekeeping missions around the world including ISAF and noted that the Croatia contribution was especially valuable. Vukelic said the CAF had elements involved in thirteen UN peacekeeping operations around the globe. The most recent deployment was of 98 CAF personnel to the UN mission in the Golan Heights. The CAF would soon deploy 15 soldiers to the EU-led mission in Chad as well as sending two helicopters and twenty soldiers to Kosovo to participate in KFOR in 2009.

¶22. (C) Education/Training: One key area of interest was in education and training. Vukelic said the joint military training exercises held with the U.S. had great value for the CAF. Lucic also emphasized the importance of educational exchanges with the U.S. military, especially expert level and

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language training. England agreed that that training and educational exchanges were important and that the USG would look into increasing the number of opportunities for such exchanges.

¶23. (C) F-16s: Lucic said the MoD wanted to replace its MiG-21 aircraft with a similar number of advanced fighters for domestic air policing. He assured England that three different offers that the U.S. made to Croatia regarding the purchase of F-16s would be carefully considered. England assured Vukelic that the USG would continue to work with the GoC on this issue, but also noted Croatia would need to budget a significant amount of money to purchase and maintain advanced fighters.

¶24. (C) MANPADS /Munitions: The agreement that the MOD signed with the Embassy about regarding the destruction of MANPADS was another excellent example of cooperation, Vukelic said. The million dollars in assistance was appreciated and the MoD also wanted to receive training about how to improve security munitions warehouses as well as how to prevent accidents. England suggested that the CHODs in the region might want to look into cooperation between the armed forces regarding the destruction of ordnance since it might be beneficial to achieve economies of scale.

¶25. (C) Cooperation with Minnesota National Guard: Vukelic praised the excellent cooperation with the Minnesota National Guard. The combined combat-support Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) Croatia was preparing to send to Afghanistan with the Minnesota National Guard illustrated the strong ties. England said he was pleased that the National Guard cooperation was going well.

¶26. (C) Foreign Military Financing (FMF): Vukelic noted that FMF had been suspended in July 2003 due to ASPA sanctions, and would be starting up again in FY09. He noted that FMF was very helpful in getting the CAF prepared for NATO. England replied that FMF was projected to increase in the upcoming years and noted that the State Department had a major role in determining the levels of FMF spending.

¶27. (U) Deputy Secretary England has cleared this cable.
Bradtke